

THE LEONARD LETTER

*A weekly electronic newsletter about
California government, business and taxes*

*Bill Leonard, Member
State Board of Equalization*

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QUOTE OF THE WEEK

*"A vote is like a rifle: its usefulness depends upon the character of the user." ---
Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), 26th President of the United States*

AROUND THE STATE

*****Governator Shows Brevity, Sagacity*****

Kudos to Governor Schwarzenegger for his veto of Assemblymember Loni Hancock's (D- Berkeley) AB 2975.

"To Members of the California State Assembly:

I am returning Assembly Bill 2975 without my signature. Redefining the level of academic achievement necessary to designate students as 'proficient' does not make the students proficient.

For this reason, I am unable to sign this bill.

Sincerely,
Arnold Schwarzenegger"

(Hat-tip to Stanford's Bill Evers.)

ON THE TRAIL

*****Ballot Study*****

The size of the Official Voter Information Guide from the Secretary of State is intimidating. At 192 pages it is more like a mail order catalog than a ballot guide. Just be careful what you order.

I am disappointed that the book is not in ballot order. Someone decided to put the arguments on the ballot measures before the candidate statements, which is not the order of the ballot itself. This can be very confusing. So as you go through the book you will first see the five measures put on the ballot by the Legislature and the Governor, then the eight measures put on the ballot by petition, and then information about candidates for statewide offices, followed by the candidates for Board of Equalization, and the last page is about the vote for Supreme Court and Appellate Justices. There is nothing in the book about the U.S. Senate candidates because state law does not permit them to submit statements.

It is clearly backward and requires effort on the voters' behalf to get information about the race they are interested in. Please do not give up-- the information is important and informed voters are crucial to the success of our system of government.

*****For a Good Time, Read Your Ballot in Spanish*****

I recently discovered that county election officials have translated my ballot title into Spanish in many different ways. My Board of Equalization district includes portions of 34 counties, so that may be the upper limit for the possible number of translations, but that remains to be seen. Common sense would seem to require the SAME translation in every county in my district.

For English language ballots, the title of my office is supposed to be listed as "Member, Board of Equalization."

In Spanish, things aren't so simple. Many counties use the Secretary of State's official Spanish translation for the title of the office I am seeking (i.e. 'Miembro, Junta de Igualacion,' which seems to mean Board of Levelers), but they translate the same exact words in my ballot title as something else. The most common translations seem to be "Miembro de la Directiva Estatal de Impuestos Sobre Ventas, Uso y Otros" (i.e., Member of the State Board of Taxes Over Sales, Use, and Others) and "Miembro, Junta de Revision de Avaluo del Estado" (i.e., Member, State Board of Appraisal Revision). There is definitely something wrong with a process that allows the same phrase to be translated so many different ways!

Of course, this situation highlights the silliness of the name Board of Equalization, which is no more descriptive in English than in Spanish. There really is no such word as "equalization" in Spanish, and the English word is a fabricated one whose meaning is not self-evident. If I succeed in my efforts to change the name to the California Tax Commission, I hope the Spanish translators will all agree to call it "la Comision de Impuesto de California."

Let's not even begin the discussion about why our ballots are translated into Spanish in the first place, and let's not even think about how mangled Board of Equalization is in the many other languages ballots into which are translated.

*****Helpful Media for Elections*****

From the Bill Leonard Blog

To that end, I thank the California Channel and KFBK radio for making candidate interviews available on their sites. The Cal Channel has videos that run with Windows Media at:

<http://www.freeairtimeproject.org/>

KFBK radio of Sacramento is building an inventory of audio candidate and proposition interviews that can be found here:

<http://www.kfbk.com/pages/novelection.html>

This is the kind of media that is genuinely helpful to voters. Kudos to them and to Nancy Vogel of the LA Times for her balanced look at Proposition 84 in Tuesday's LA times:

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/politics/cal/la-me-water3oct03,1,4730428.story>

MISCELLANY

*****California County History*****

Tulare County was created in 1852. While hunting for deserters in 1772, Commandante Fages discovered a great lake surrounded by marshes and filled with rushes which he named Los Tules (the tules). The root of that word is the word tullin, which refers to cattail or similar reeds.

Sequoia National Park, the third national park to be designated, is located in Tulare County. It contains Mt. Whitney, the highest point in the contiguous 48 United States, at 14,505 feet. It also is home to the largest tree on earth, the General Sherman tree, and five of the world's ten largest trees. The park was the site of the home of the first European settler to homestead in the area. Hale Tharp built his home out of a hollowed-out fallen Giant Sequoia log in the Giant Forest. The park also includes at least 240 caves, including California's longest, the Lilburn Cave that is 20 miles long. Since 2001, more than 17 caves have been discovered in the park.

Tulare County competes with Fresno County as the most productive county in California for agricultural revenues. It is the home to the annual World Ag Expo, the world's largest agricultural exposition, which is held the second week of February.

The Tulare County Historical Society has a fascinating list of landmarks in the county, including the Election Tree, at which a party commanded by Major James D. Savage conducted the election on July 10, 1852 by which Tulare County was organized, and Fort Visalia where pioneer settlers first built a log stockade and lived during the fall and winter of 1852-1853. See the link at:

<http://tularecountyhistoricalsociety.org/Landmarks.htm>

*****A Good Read*****

This week I recommend “The Challenge of Liberty: Classical Liberalism Today” edited by Robert Higgs and Carl P. Close. The book is a collection of essays by economists, historians and philosophers published by the Independent Institute that explores the roots of the thinking about “individual liberty, personal responsibility, private property, natural law, and free institutions.” Contrast just those words with much of what our society and political system has devolved to. James Buchanan’s essay includes this insight: “Classical liberals...quite literally went to sleep during the decade of the 1980s, especially after the death of socialism both in idea and in practice. The nanny-state, paternalist, mercantilist, rent-seeking regimes in which we now live emerged from the vacuum in political philosophy.” The essays in the book are invigorating, reminding us about the necessity of freedom and moral society and the continuing importance of fighting totalitarianism in its many, many forms.

BOE AND LEGISLATIVE DATES

October 11, 2006 --- Board of Equalization meets in Sacramento.

October 23, 2006 --- Last day to register to voter before November’s general election. If you will be turning 18 prior to election day, you may turn in your registration form by this day and be eligible to vote November 7th. For more information, go to http://www.ss.ca.gov/elections/elections_vr.htm

October 31, 2006 --- Small Business Fair in Sacramento with free tax advice for businesspeople. For information and registration, see <http://www.boe.ca.gov/sutax/tpsched.htm>

November 1, 2006 --- Last day to apply for an absentee ballot for the general election.

November 7, 2006 --- General election day.

November 11, 2006 – Veterans’ Day.

November 15, 2006 --- Board of Equalization meets in Konocti Harbor with County Assessors.

November 20-21, 2006 -- Board of Equalization meets in Sacramento.

November 23, 2006 --- Thanksgiving Day.

December 4, 2006 --- The 2007-08 Regular Session of the Legislature convenes for an organizational session at 12 noon (Art. IV, Sec. 3(a)).

NOTABLE DATES/ HISTORY

October 10, 1978 --- President Carter signed a bill authorizing the Susan B Anthony dollar.

October 11, 1890 --- The Daughters of the American Revolution founded

October 12, 1492 --- Columbus arrived in the Bahamas; the real Columbus Day.

October 12, 1915 --- Theodore Roosevelt criticized U.S. citizens with dual nationalities.

October 12, 1957 --- The first commercial flight occurred between California and Antarctica.

October 12, 1973 --- President Nixon nominated Gerald Ford to replace Spiro Agnew as Vice President.

October 12, 1977 --- U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments in the “reverse discrimination” case of Allan Bakke, a white student denied admission to University of California Medical School.

October 13, 1792 --- George Washington laid the cornerstone of the Executive Mansion (White House).

October 14, 1912 --- Bull Moose Teddy Roosevelt was shot while campaigning in Milwaukee.

October 14, 1986 --- Concentration camp survivor Elie Wiesel won the Nobel Peace Prize.

October 15, 1863 --- The Cliff House opened in San Francisco. It was the first of many on the site.

October 15, 1966 --- President Lyndon B. Johnson signed a bill creating the Department of Transportation.

GENERAL TAX INFORMATION

For answers to your general tax questions, call the Board of Equalization information center. Customer service representatives are available to help you from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Pacific time, Monday through Friday (except state holidays).

Toll-free number: 800-400-7115
TDD service for the hearing impaired
TDD phones: 800-735-2929
Voice phones: 800-735-2922

To reach the Taxpayer Rights Advocate’s office for assistance with any BOE issues, see <http://www.boe.ca.gov/tra/tra.htm>, or call toll-free 1-888-324-2798.

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